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Essay on Dysentery

No. 42.

By Joseph A Tate of Pennsylva
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An account of an epidemic dysentery, as it appeared in Bedford County, and the eastern part of the state of Pennsylvania, during the summer of 1815.

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As a history of dysentery has been given by every medical author, whose writings we have had an opportunity of consulting, I will try and give a short account of it as it appeared in Bedford County, and more particularly throughout the state of Pennsylvania during the last summer, from the best information I could receive from practitioners who contended with it in different parts of the state where it prevailed. My object in extending this account throughout the state, is, to get it in all its malignant and ~~hideous~~ forms, in which it did not appear under my immediate observation.

As far as my information is correct, this disease was prevalent throughout all the eastern part of this state, and that with the greatest malignancy and fatality, and the farther west it extended the milder it appeared to get in its pernicious effects. But, that the causes

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of the disease were the same wherever it occurred, I am fully satisfied, from the information I have obtained from different practitioners who contended with it.

The first cases of this disease which came under my notice in Bedford County, were about the first of september, previous to which, the weather had been exceedingly dry and hot for the preceding month, and consequent to which there fell a heavy and cool rain as it was observed for the time of year; this rain was not of long duration, but it cooled the atmosphere and dampened the earth considerably; after this rain we had dews and fogs every night and morning, and it was not until these dews and fogs made their first appearance that this disease commenced its ravages in our part of the country, but for some time previous to this --, it had been prevalent in the eastern part of the state, which being brought on in the same way, prompted me to

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conclude that the predisposing cause was the cold and dampness of the atmosphere, which tended to debilitate the system, which gave room for the exciting causes to act, which as I suppose were contained in or set into motion by these dews and fogs; and another circumstance that tended to confirm this supposition, was, that the first few cases of the disease I met with were most malignant, which gradually grew milder as the dampness of the weather disappeared until it vanished entirely.

The first few cases I saw of this disease generally attacked the patient with lassitude, cold shivering, with succeeding heat and other symptoms of fever. It at other times commenced with a bad taste in the mouth, Loss of appetite, costiveness or an inclination to go to stool, sickness at stomach and not unfrequently vomiting. In a few cases where I saw it attack children, it was attended with a bloated countenance and the lips somewhat

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to attend to them in the application of remedies.
Of Bloodletting. This remedy appears to have been employed by every medical author who has treated of the disease, and it appears to hold a prominent place in all the books of medicine. Dr Sydenham, whose writings have thrown considerable light on the management of diseases, says he has employed this remedy, & never without advantage. This is no doubt the fact, but the disease he met with must have differed essentially from that which we have in the united states, for I have been informed by many practitioners who contended with it in different parts, that they never employed this remedy but with disadvantage, I am likewise satisfied of this from my own observation.
Of Cathartics. These are remedies which can be used in every stage of the disease with advantage, they should be very brisk in the first stage of the disease, but where the disease has made

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any progress, they should be of the mildest kind. The cathartics which I employed, were Glaubers salt with a little antimonial wine, ol ricini, flowers of sulphur, rhubarb, and as Dr Barton recommends, I employed Moseleys solution, which did not fulfil my expectations. ?

Of Emetics. These are remedies which I never omitted, deriving so much advantage from them, I should not say emetics here, as I did not employ them for that effect, but solely for their diaphoretic power, for this purpose I employed Dovers powder, and it always fulfilled my expectations, increasing perspiration, lessening the fever, & mitigating the inflammatory symptoms.

Of Blisters. These I employed with great advantage, and have seen them employed in every stage of the disease. I applied them to the extremeties and abdomen, they counteract irritation, and lessen in some degree inflammation.

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